REFLECTIONS ON BELONGING TO THE CHURCH
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PULPIT

The question of belonging to the church is usually debated only by men + women. Most people act out their answer - w/o thinking about it much

Sooner or later anyone who takes the Church seriously must ask, "What does it mean to belong?" Not that the question is presented in that form as a topic for discussion at the dinner table. It isn't. Rather, the question is asked and our answer is given in a myriad of ways: on Sunday morning when we decide what to do with our time at 10:45: when a baby is born and we experience the need publically to affirm and celebrate something: when we are sick in the hospital and want to know that we are not alone: when we want to enter into that most intimate of relationships called marriage and experience the need for the relationship to be sealed with something more than a Justice of the Peace's legal sanction: when someone pushes a pledge card at us and haltingly tries to tell us that the group of people down at the corner of Longlois and 29th need us - and we sign or don't sign: when someone dies and in the midstof our grief we know that, even though the deceased never darkened the door, the Church can say with some authority that this life mattered: and so on - and so on.

To reflect on belonging to the church is to begin with that, namely the fact that most people do relate in some way to the Church; perhaps unconsciously, but nevertheless usually at those times in life when something important is happening: birth, marriage, sickness, death.

To belong to the church is consciously to stand with those people who in turn, believe that it is a good thing to stand with other people as they live ~~xxx~~ through the important times in life. That, it seems to me, is where it begins with most people.

But "belonging to" must be more than that. People who have the word "Presbyterian" attached to their affiliation believe that the church is what happens when Christians are together. Now, we've never wanted to seem exclusive: we've never been as eager as some to banish to hell all those who prefer not to belong to our club. And yet we refuse to let go of this conviction that the person who ~~xx~~ is drawn to Jesus Christ is drawn to his church. We refuse to let go of this old conviction that there is no such thing as a solitary Christian: that being a Christian is something one does with others - and that being christians together means being the church - or belonging to, if you will.

And behind it all is the winsomeness of this man, this Jesus who walked among us a long time ago, and summoned a group of men to be his friends, and who - in summoning them to discipleship actually made them his church.

Someone wrote recently - and I like this very much: "The church began with men who were

friends of Jesus, and in my opinion that still ought to be the test of membership. They all believed different things and had different points of view...they were more interested in carrying out his works than in arguing about creeds..." (Weatherhead P.159)

So, in the course of time = 1970, to be precise - when the people at the corner of Longlois and 29th decided to set out what it means to belong they came up with a statement that is lean, that says simply what Presbyterians have always said; and then they attached six disciplines to help anyone who happened to wonder what one does if one happens to want to belong.

They also determined that it was a good thing for all the people to think about their belonging at least once a year and to say outloud that, "Yes - we are the church. Yes - we believe that this winsome man who walked among us long ago was, in fact, the Son of God, And yes, somewhere deep inside us we have felt drawn to him; the minister likes to talk about the "Call to Discipleship", but for us it's simply a matter of being drawn to him - or not quite being able to shake him. And yes, we have come to understand that when we take that first step to follow him we get involved with other people who are at various stages in that same pilgrimage. And yes, we confess - although sometimes it isn't easy - that we do belong to them and they to us. And yes, although piety isn't very fashionable, we do intend to try - to be here when the others gather to worship, and we will acknowledge God's presence in our lives by praying, and we will regard this Holy Book as something other than a leather bound dust catcher, or a good luck charm which coordinates will with daisies if the leather is white; and we will try to be honest about the fact that this Jesus has a lot of things he'd like to see done in the world, but that he's dependent on our generosity, and we will help by loving and working and saying yes when we'd rather say no, and when the moment comes we won't apologize for who we are and what we believe and how what we believe has shaped our lives.

I invite you now to renew your belonging to the church. If you are a member of another church, renew your belonging to that church. If you are not a member of a church, in the name of Jesus Christ I invite you today to decide to become one.

Let us now affirm who we are - and what we believe and what we are about. Will you join me as we read the Covenant of Church Membership together.....